

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE 13

U.S. NEWS & WORLD REPORT
25 January 1982

Plugging Leaks: It's Reagan's Turn

Now it's Ronald Reagan's turn to try what other Presidents have attempted without much success—plug leaks of government secrets to the press.

The President launched his drive on January 12 by ordering that all contacts of officials with reporters on classified matters be cleared in advance.

So tough is the crackdown that Deputy Defense Secretary Frank Carlucci and other Pentagon chiefs submitted to lie-detector tests in the search to determine who had leaked a secret report saying that Reagan's defense buildup could cost 750 billion dollars more than had been disclosed. Results of the probe were not announced.

Reagan also was irked over advance reports of his decision not to sell latest model jet fighters to Taiwan. Other leaks revealed U.S. fears that Libyan assassins might be trying to kill Reagan and that his plane had been rigged with an antimissile device.

Though national security is cited as the motive for gagging leakers, the reasons are political, too. As Reagan recently told editors of this magazine: *"It seems you can't even think about a subject without suddenly reading about it or hearing about it. . . . Sometimes there are erroneous reports that you can't correct, because to correct them might be to destroy some very delicate negotiations on the international scene."*

Yet those closest to the President leak items when it suits them. White House Chief of Staff James Baker privately told reporters for weeks that the National Security Council was not working well. His complaints helped bring about a shake-up of the NSC and dismissal of its chief, Richard Allen.

But officials are so sensitive to Reagan's crackdown that the State and Defense departments restricted contacts with reporters. Even the Agriculture Department ordered officials to clear press interviews with the White House.

Similar campaigns have failed in the past. Leaks in the Nixon era led to creation of the White House "plumbers" unit and to wiretaps—moves that were themselves leaked and were a key factor in the Watergate scandals.

Jimmy Carter threatened to dismiss leakers, then asked top aides to sign pledges that they were not the source of news reports.

Despite that record, Reagan is trying to set up his own line of defense in a capital he calls "one gigantic ear." □